

The rational account of the policy making process is one that attempts to connect problems and goals as efficiently as possible. Abiding by this perspective, or any single perspective, creates challenges because each has different assumptions built into it. The assumptions within this perspective attempt to explain how humans will react when presented a problem and by which means they will attempt to solve this problem based on their own values and ideas as well as their analysis of cost/benefit. Furthermore, the empirical facts of the rational perspective create challenges within the agenda-setting and policy formulation stages because the real world does not always abide by all these assumptions as it is limited in information, time, and capacity.

The rational perspective holds different assumptions that prove to create challenges during both the agenda-setting stage as well as during the formulation stage. First, the rational perspective operates under the assumption that one single actor that is capable of controlling, managing, and governing the entire policy system exists and governs. Our policy system, however, does not operate under this system of government but rather governance. Perhaps stemming from this assumption comes another challenge: since there is no single central actor whose agenda issues need to be moved onto, there are multiple actors who want different issues and problems moved onto different agendas; however, agendas are limited in their carrying capacity. Since agendas are limited and selective, according to the barrier model as presented in BFS, problems need to overcome different barriers before they come to exist on the policy agenda. In order for an issue to make it onto the agenda, it must first rise on the public agenda, then the political agenda, and lastly, the policy agenda. The rational perspective has different assumptions built into it – one of which being that attention does not matter because actors are simply rational, however, in order for issues to make it onto the different agendas, generating attention is important and necessary. Generating attention for issues can be done in a number of

ways using different policy instruments. Use of these instruments, under the rational perspective, assumes that everyone has the ability to access and understand all information presented; however, humans do not have an unlimited ability to understand information but rather they are bounded rationally (BFS 133). Actors are limited in their abilities to understand information presented because they may not have access to all necessary information, they may be unaware of an indicator, or they may not understand the information presented to them. Overall, many of the assumptions behind the rational perspective: a single central actor, ability of all actors to possess and understand information, and that actors are rational creates challenges during the agenda-setting stage because these assumptions do not hold true.

The formulation stage of the policy process also creates challenges under the different assumptions of the rational perspective. Many of the challenges here too come from the assumption of having the full knowledge and capabilities necessary to understand the information presented. Once an issue has made it onto the political agenda, political actors need to systematically analyze and reason in order to properly understand the issue and proceed to create different ideas to solve this policy issue. First, political actors must think of an issue in terms of cause/effects. This creates a challenge with many societal problems because it is difficult to draw causal models since many problems don't have exclusively one direct cause or one direct effect. For example, SBF writes "...if we look at the viability of neighborhoods, we see that safety is just one issue, while the quality of physical environment, the facilities in the neighborhood and the social infrastructure also seem to matter" (165). Next, issues and their causes/effects need to be put into context with the policy program. Following that, policies need to be adjusted as to address the many values of different political actors. Since actors are limited in the amount of information they have and each have different values, challenges arise because

“multiple and interlinked causes and effects and all kinds of actions with all kinds of effects, side-effects and trade-offs can be discerned” (165-166). Furthermore, when actors attempt to formulate policy ideas, they are met with ambiguity and uncertainty, making it more difficult to create a casual model under this perspective based on these assumptions. Similarly to the challenges that arise during the agenda-setting stage, new challenges arise during the formulation stage that question the assumptions behind the rational perspective and often point to other assumptions from different perspectives that hold better in the real world.

Ultimately, rational accounts of the policy making process create challenges because the empirical facts and assumptions behind this perspective do not hold true in the real world. Furthermore, even if an assumption holds to be partially true, it is limited because humans are too limited time, capacity, and in their ability to understand and access all information. Additionally, these limitations extend to the agenda-setting and formulation stages of the policy process because other assumptions such as a single central government and that attention is not important go directly against how the stages play out in the real world and how humans are influenced or how they act.

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